DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 325 769 CG 022 922

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TITLE The Impact of Parents and Parenting on Career Development.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Ability; *Career Awareness; *Career Development; *Career Exploration; *Child Development; Childhood Needs; Elementary Secondary Education; Family Environment; *Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Influence; School Readiness

ABSTRACT

Parents have a pervasive and continual influence on their children's career development, beginning with early childhood and continuing as the child progresses through fantasy, exploration, tentative and trial stages of career development, and as the child responds to the question "What do you want to be when you grow up?" The child's readiness for school--language skills, social competence, and curiosity--almost predetermines the child's success in school and career directions; those who are less ready for school are more likely to lag behind throughout school, with corresponding limits on their later career prospects. By adolescence, children's vocational maturity, as determined by their own estimate of academic verbal and quantitative ability and by their interests and values, is highly related to their choice of occupation and curriculum. Consequently, students during this period should have the opportunity to experience career exploration and decisionmaking, involving their parents, community resources, teachers, and counselors. During all this time, parents have a consistent and pervasive influence on children's career choices, decisions, and plans, through their modeling of standards, expectations, social skills, and self-acceptance. School counselors, therefore, need to collaborate with parents and assist them in improving their effectiveness with their children. Fourteen specific recommendations for parents are provided. (TE)

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The Impact of Parents and Parenting on Career Development

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The fact that parents are their children's first and most influential teachers is well known. What is less well known is the pervasive and continual impact they have on their child's career development. This begins at least at birth, with the first 3-4 years the most critical, and continues as the child progresses through the fantasy, exploration, tentative and trial stages of career development, and responds to the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" During this period children acquire at least 50 percent of their eventual intelligence as well as significant growth in language, social competence and curiosity. A developmental deficit in any of these skills is likely to influence and limit both the child's career development and eventual career choices. The child's readiness for school, as assisted by the parents, almost predetermines the child's in-school success and career directions. Children who are less ready for school than their peers have difficulty in "catching up" and will more likely be either among those retained (failed) or, the longer they remain in school, become increasingly behind their peers in skill development. However, if the school provided more one-to-one personal attention, tutoring and positive interaction to the children with identified skill deficits during the K-3 years, these children would likely be more successful in school and, in turn, become more self confident.

CG022922

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By the time children are in the eighth grade, their vocational maturity, as determined by their own estimate of their academic verbal and quantitative ability and by their interests and value orientation, is highly related to their choices of occupation and curriculum. Consequently, students during this period should have the opportunity to experience a career exploration and decision-making module which involves their parents, community resources, teachers and counselors. The decision process normally includes a series of steps to arrive at a vocational choice: self-study and self-knowledge, developing a plan of action and getting an early try-out experience. To the extent that students have the opportunity to understand their abilities, the career opportunities available, and have made tentative decisions for a future career, they are more vocationally mature. However, because this information tends to be limited and unplanned, too many students are forced to make curricular decisions for which they are not ready. Gribbons and Lohnes (1982) in their 20 year longitudinal study of careers concluded that "the majority of adolescents are poorly oriented with respect to career development tasks" (p. 127).

The pre-adolescent/early adolescent period (middle school and junior high) is increasingly viewed as critical in the career development process. During this period students begin to evaluate and decide what their niche in the world of work might be, using whatever information they had available from their home and community. Perhaps because of their earlier physiological development, girls appear, by age 14-17 according to Berryman (1987), to have

committed themselves to family or to work which in turn determines the nature of the school curriculum they will choose to pursue. Consequently girls as a group appear to need career developmental assistance earlier than boys.

Preferably by grade 9, students should be helped to explore and to make tentative vocational choices based upon their interests, aptitudes and values. In turn, a tentative career choice, once made, has a strong motivating power and can play an important role in keeping the potential drop-out in school. Miller and Imel (1987) have found that career education helps in improving school attendance, retention, and vocational program completion.

Parenting and Career Development

Birk and Blimline (1984) concluded that parents have the greatest impact on their child's self-concept, goals, values and aspirations and, consequently, have a pervasive, consistent and long-term impact on the child's career choices, decisions and plans. Parents, as daily models, provide cultural standards, attitudes and expectations and, in many ways, determine the eventual adequacy of self-acceptance and confidence, of social skills and of sex roles (Boyer and Horne, 1989). The attitudes and behaviors of parents while working or discussing their work is what their children respond to and learn. Parents, consequently, play a major role in supporting and encouraging school achievement and career choice.

Many studies have indicated that who enters what occupation is influenced by the father's occupation and his socioeconomic status. What

the child in the family learns, then, is about work, work experience, and stereotypes. For example, being born to parents with limited education and income reduces the likelihood of going to college or achieving a professional occupational goal and essentially predetermines the child's likely vocational choice. If parents or other adults are not available, children have difficulty in developing interests, acquiring skills or have future aspirations, again limiting career development. In addition to the experiences available to the child, heredity appears also to affect basic attitudes, interests and capacities and may influence their choice of the physical sciences, social sciences or medicine.

How schools and parents can assist one another

Otto, in reporting the results of Gallup's Ninth Annual Poll (1978), indicated that a major concern of parents for adolescents ages 13-20 was how to help their child choose a career. The majority of these parents indicated that public schools should provide ways for parents to learn how to become more effective.

School counselors need to involve parents, to collaborate with them and to assist them to improve their effectiveness with their children. Improved parenting skills will help them cope with the demands of raising children in today's world and, at the same time, assist the parents to understand the career developmental changes their child is experiencing. Some school counselors have used Active Parenting or Systematic Training for Effective Parenting or a similar approach with groups of parents, step or blended families, single parents, etc. to improve family interaction and communication

which, in turn, assists career discussion. As recommended by the Council of Chief State School Officers (1990), "schools must build upon the role of families as teachers and must adapt to changed family responsibilities and patterns" (p. 7). The results of a recent study by Bain, Lintz and Word (1989), on effective teachers, identified a number of techniques that school counselors might adopt or adapt to increase communication on career development between the school and home: using early morning or evening phone calls or conferences and by asking teachers to send homework instructions, individualized notes, class newsletters, etc. Parents, in addition, need to be encouraged to listen to their children read, to help them with their math, to check their homework and to participate in various school and out-of-school activities. School counselors and teachers who involve parents are successful because they work at it. When possible, they provide information at times and in places that are convenient to busy work and family schedules.

For parents, according to Hummel and McDaniels (1979), "the first and most essential ingredient in helping a child in his/her career development process is faith" (p. 19) so that the child develops confidence in his/her own capabilities. Beyond faith they suggest the need for parents, as related to the career planning process, to demonstrate such behaviors as acceptance, trust, responsiveness, empathy, dependability and consistency. Heading a list of 13 tasks which parents might use to help the career development of the child, they recommended that "Parents must help their children learn that basic work attitudes of promptness, respect, responsibility and interest in schoolwork are expected both at home and at school" (p. 31).

A recent study by Palmer and Cochran (1988), to test the effectiveness of a program for parents to help their adolescent children in career planning, concluded that "parents can function effectively in fostering the career development of their children, when provided with a structured program they can follow" (p. 71).

Herr and Cramer (1979) suggests 14 specific ways that parents can contribute to the career development of their children:

"1.Encourage and assist their children to analyze their interests, capabilities, and limitations.

2.In those work areas with which they are most familiar, help their children relate worker traits, conditions of work, life styles of workers, and potential opportunities for work.

3.Discuss work values that parents have experienced in themselves and others and relate some of the consequences which result.

4.Discuss the economic condition of the family and assist the youth to plan a course of action with regard to education and training needs within or by which they can break out of the constraints of these conditions.

5.Provide encouragement and information as to how their child can use the knowledge, experience, and services of relatives, friends, fellow workers, and community or state agencies in exploring, planning, and preparing for their work role.

6.Provide the necessary example and counsel to their children during critical developmental periods of their life in an attempt to have them establish and maintain a positive self-concept.

7.Through example, display the attitude that all persons have dignity and worth no matter what occupational position they hold.

8.Provide situations so that their children can experience decision-making and carry responsibility for the consequences of those decisions.

9.Provide open communication between home and school so that the experiences and the consultation possibilities in both environments can be used in meeting the needs of the children involved.

10.Encourage their children to explore a wide spectrum of alternatives, both educationally and occupationally, without stereotyping or labeling any alternatives to discourage the child's consideration of them.

11.Be sensitive to and accept the ambivalence or tentativeness which children frequently exhibit in regard to self-images or images of future career alternatives.

12.Without defensiveness about their lack of specific information, help their children make contact with specialists or information relevant to their concerns.

13.Learn about the relationships between specific educational patterns and occupations in order to assist their children to plan their educational experiences effectively.

14.Provide opportunities for work within the home and the community with the opportunity to accept responsibility." (pp. 262-3)

Other sources of assistance to parents include:

1.How to Help Your Child Choose a Career, Luther B. Otto, New York: M. Evand, 1984.

2.Parent Career Guidance Manual (and others), Larry Cochran, Richmond, British Columbia: Buchanan-Wells.

3.How to Help Your Child Plan a Career, Dean Hummel and Carl McDaniels, Washington, D.C.: Acropolis Books Ltd., 1979.

In many ways, the child's vocational choice may depend upon the parent's personal support, advice, contacts and finances. Given the tremendous and unsettling family, economic, and job market changes, parents must be a continual source of support to their child. An active partnership between the parents and the school can aid students in improving both their achievement and self-confidence. As a result, more students will be better prepared to choose careers which correspond to their potential.

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Abstract

Parents exert a pervasive and continual impact on the career development of their children. How and when this is done is described. The need for home-school partnership is emphasized.